

Dear Community,

I am speaking to you as the superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, one of the largest school districts in the nation.

I am also speaking to you as the father of two young daughters, as a member of our community, and a citizen of our country.

I am speaking about yet another tragic school shooting, one that took place in Michigan recently. The shooter was 15, and reports say he carried a semiautomatic handgun into his high school in his backpack. Now, four students between 14 and 17 years old are dead and seven others, including a teacher, injured.

On Dec. 14, [a gun was fired](#) on the campus of West Charlotte High School. No one was struck, but the incident serves as a stark example of why it is critical for all members of the community to join together to [keep guns out of our schools](#).

For me — for our CMS Board members, our principals, our teachers, and our support staff — these are not just news stories that will be replaced by other headlines in a week. This issue is a reality for us — one that we try to prepare for while hoping and praying it does not happen in CMS.

But hope and prayer is not enough. Talking is not enough. We need action and commitment from our entire community to prevent gun violence from seeping into our schools.

Here is what we have done so far:

1. I have met with the Mecklenburg district attorney, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police chief, Mecklenburg sheriff, U.S. Attorney's office, District Court judges and city and county leaders to collaborate on solutions to the growing crisis.
2. I've directed a staff workgroup to evaluate all possible safety options for our schools, including adding more campus security associates.
3. We have ordered [clear backpacks](#) for high school. (Delivery is delayed until February.)
4. In January, we are implementing an [anonymous reporting tool](#) for middle and high school students.
5. We have doubled the number of random safety screenings in all secondary schools.
6. We are evaluating and reviewing costs for touchless screening equipment that detects weapons.

7. We train staff about what to do during an active shooter situation.
8. We have added more social/emotional support for students.
9. We've engaged with city and county partners to share strategies that reach out into the community to support, educate and repair the issues creating these problems.
10. We are enforcing consequences for violations of state law, school board policy, and the Code of Student Conduct.
11. We offer restorative practice, which aims to improve school climate by developing community and managing conflict and tensions.

As educators, we believe that to learn, students must not only feel safe but BE safe. When most of us signed up to teach, lead or support schools, few anticipated we would become responsible for keeping guns out of our classrooms. But it's the reality we face, so we are taking steps to ensure as much security as we can offer.

But we cannot do it alone. We must ensure that guns do not fall into the hands of children. We must ensure that students who are struggling with issues that make guns seem like a solution receive care and attention. We must ensure that we are a community that does not tolerate casual treatment of guns, violence or threats.

CMPD is doubling the Crime Stoppers reward from \$250 to up to \$500 for information leading to an arrest or firearm found on campus.

Many community leaders are investing resources so that public institutions can do our part. But we need the community's help to make this more than a temporary fix. We need to solve the problem of guns in schools once and for all.

I can be reached at superintendent@cms.k12.nc.us. While I can't respond to every email personally, your remarks will be reviewed as we work toward progress.

Thank you for your resolve to make CMS one of the best learning environments, but also the safest school district in the nation.

Earnest Winston is Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.